Castro Stalker Worked for the CIA

By Jack Anderson

The mystery man whom the Central Intelligence Agency recruited to assassinate Cuba's Fidel Castro has been laid up in the sick ward of the Los Angeles County jail.

He is handsome, hawk-faced John Roselli, once a dashing figure around Hollywood and Las Vegas, now a gray, 66-year-old inmate with a respiratory ailment.

Confidential FBI files identify him as "a top Mafia figure" who watched over "the concealed interests in Las Vegas casinos of the Chicago underworld."

Roselli has admitted to friends that he was a rum runner during the Roaring Twenties. Operating along the East Coast, he learned how to evade Coast Guard cutters and police patrols.

His name later became linked with the biggest names in the Chicago and Los Angeles underworlds. He also developed contacts in the Cuban underworld before Castro took over the Havana gambling casinos.

He had the right background for a hush-hush mission that the CIA was planning in 1961. As part of the Bay of Pigs invasion, the CIA hoped to knock off Castro and leave Cuba leaderless.

Risks Neck

Roselli was recruited for the job by Robert Maheu, a former FBI agent, who admitted to us that he had handled undercover assignments for the CIA. He refused, however, to discuss the details. This is the same Maheu, incidentally, who is now involved in a legal battle over phantom billionaire Howard Hughes' Nevada operations.

Roselli was so flattered over being asked to perform a secret mission for the U.S. government that he paid all his expenses out of his own pocket and risked his neck to land the assassination teams on the Cuban coast.

In James Bond fashion, he held whispered meetings in Miami Beach hotels with Cubans willing to make an attempt on Castro's life. Once, he called on Chicago racket boss Sam Giancana to line up a contact. The confidential files report that Giancana had "gambling interest and an interest in the shrimp business in Cuba." However, the Chicago gangster took no direct part in the assassination plot.

Roselli made midnight dashes to Cuba with his hired assassins in twin powerboats. Once a Cuban patrol ship turned its guns on his darkened boat, tore a hole in the bottom and sank the boat. Roselli was fished out of the water by the other boat, which escaped into the shadows.

In earlier columns, we reported how the CIA furnished Roselli with deadly poison capsules which he tried through a relative of Castro's chef to plant in the dictator's food. Later, marksmen armed with high-powered Belgian rifles attempted to infiltrate close enough to gun Castro down.

All told, six assassination attempts were made, the last in the spring of 1963. Throughout this period, Roselli worked under the direct supervision of two secret CIA agents, William Harvey and James (Big Jim) O'Connell.

Roselli's Reward

The FBI which got wind of the assassination plot, has tried to pump Roselli for information. But he was sworn to silence by the CIA, and up to this moment, he hasn't broken it.

Meanwhile, the Justice Department, as part of its crackdown on organized crime, tried to nail Roselli. The FBI discovered that his Chicago birth records had been forged, that his name was really Filippo Sacco, and that he had come to this country from Italy as a child. He was convicted for failing to register as an alien.

He was also convicted for conspiracy to rig card games at Los Angeles' exclusive Friar's Club.

Of Roselli's two CIA associates, Harvey has now retired to Indianapolis and O'Connell is still on the CIA payroll. Both admitted to us a friendship with Roselli but refused to discuss their CIA activities. Harvey said he had a "high regard" for Roselli and called the Friar's Club case a "bum rap." Said Harvey: "The Friar's Club indictment is phony. Roselli had no more to do with that than I had."

Roselli's lawyers are now trying to get clemency for their client, citing our stories about his secret CIA service.

Firearms Fiasco

Under pressure from the firearms lobby, the Treasury Department has failed to enforce a vital section of the 1968 federal firearms act.

The law was passed after the murders of Sen. Robert Kennedy and Dr. Martin Luther King. It authorizes the Treasury Secretary to require full reports of all firearms and ammunition sales.

For the two years that the law has been in force, the Treasury Department has ignored this key provision. The gun industry has complained it would be a bookkeeping nightmare.

The federal government, which would have to compile all the sales data, has also been reluctant to spend the $100 million it would cost for computers and staff to maintain the firearms files.

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